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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000754

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAO](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (5/06): GUESSING AT WHAT PROGRESS
HAS BEEN MADE IN NEGOTIATIONS

Main Stories:

Positive coverage of the meeting between Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Premier Olmert appears on all front pages. According to the lead stories, discussions between the two leaders were, "deep and serious." However, reports also highlight the "gap" that remains between the two sides' positions on many issues. Al-Quds quotes Abbas spokesperson Abu Rudaynah stating that, "positions are still very far apart on the borders issue." Al-Ayyam runs a second Abu Rudaynah quote, "Abbas will have to make dramatic decisions if an agreement is not reached." Meanwhile, Nimr Hamad, political advisor to Abbas, tells Al-Quds, "the American Administration is working on getting agreement for a framework on the definition [of borders] of a future Palestinian state." Hamad also refutes press reports that Abbas is frustrated with the current status of negotiations.

The dailies report that Secretary Rice has asked Israel to reach an agreement with the Palestinians on, "borders for a Palestinian state," during the upcoming visit by President Bush. Al-Ayyam highlights that Rice confirmed that, "the two sides are making progress." On the ground, the dailies focus on news that American "supervisors" will be, "monitoring the removal of checkpoints," in the West Bank.

Palestinian Authority (PA) security efforts in Jenin win positive coverage in the dailies. The papers report that the security campaign will begin by focusing on villages surrounding Jenin. Al-Quds reports that Jenin Mufti, Muhammed Salah, praised the PA security efforts and called upon the people of Jenin to obey security rules and the law and to help the PA achieve its security mission in the city. Ministry of Information Al-Malki adds his

support to the mission, stating that the PA government is determined to make the Jenin security campaign a success, papers note.

According to front page reports, Palestinian Authority employees will receive their salaries and another 1000 Shekels (200 USD) on May 6. Palestinian Information Minister Al-Malki revealed to press that, "the Government has earmarked money to implement projects in the cities of Jenin and Hebron." The projects will include industrial and infrastructure projects, reporting adds.

Regarding the issue of Nablus wheat flour being fit for human consumption, Al Ayaam's front page runs comments by the Minister of Information Al-Malki stating that the flour in Nablus, "is not suitable for human consumption." He adds that, "we are waiting to send the flour out of the country." The article continues weekend reporting from the Maan news website that, "hundreds of Palestinians... attacked World Food Program (WFP) warehouses on Sunday, demanding that they have access to donated flour that the Palestinian Health Ministry says is unfit for human consumption." Neither article mentions the U.S. government as the source of the donated flour and coverage continues to define the issue as a UN-Palestinian Authority affair.

Ongoing Palestinian preparations to commemorate "the catastrophe" [nakba] receives extensive coverage in the dailies. Related coverage highlights the Israeli closure of West Bank checkpoints in preparation of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations. The dailies also note that Israeli forces invaded Nablus and Qalqilia on May 5.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

11. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial entitled "Negotiations... lost time" (5/06): "After meeting with Abu Mazen [Abbas] and heads of the Palestinian and Israeli negotiation teams, Secretary Rice extended her visit to the region in order to continue talks with the Israeli side. We have heard news about progress being achieved regarding border issues. An Israeli source has said that things are moving forward and Dr. Sa'eb Erakat says that, "negotiations were serious." In any case, the American President Bush is coming to the region in a few days to participate in the Israeli celebrations of independence. He will also hold meetings with Arab officials and with Abu Mazen regarding the promised solution... we are facing a critical time and any observer needs enormous optimism to believe that it is possible for real and serious movement on the settlement issue and an agreement during the remaining months of Bush's term. It is probably more realistic to say that these negotiations are [just lost time] which in the best case scenario will only lead to a new declaration of principles that will need [never-ending] negotiations to be implemented..."

12. Independent Al-Ayyam features veteran columnist Hani Al-Masri, opining under the title, "What is the reason for Rice's optimism?" (5/06): "Despite all indications that many difficulties still stand in the way of an Israeli- Palestinian agreement, Secretary Rice still believes in the possibility of reaching an agreement this year. So, what is the reason for Rice's optimism? The answer might be found in the comments made by an Israeli official regarding... a request by Secretary Rice to publish a document that reveals the progress that has been made until now in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations... This progress ... will show the outlines of a peace agreement that will not be implemented right now, but will clarify the political horizon for future negotiations... Rice continues to spread hope because [she knows that lack of it]... will become a roadblock to future negotiation efforts and make the American role seem like nothing but a [political] game."

WALLES